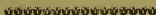


ADVENTURES OF A MIER PRISONER



Being the Thrilling Experiences of
John Rufus Alexander

Who was with the Ill-Fated
Expedition Which Invaded Mexico

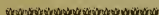


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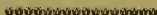
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Adventures of a Mier Prisoner

*Thrilling Story of John Rufus Alexander, a Member of the
Ill-Fated Expedition into Mexico*

Written by John Warren Hunter

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At dawn, September 11, 1842, Gen. Woll at the head of 1,200 troops took possession of the town of San Antonio. The battle on the Salado followed on the 17th, where a mere handful of men under old "Paint" Caldwell, after fighting nearly all day, sent the minions of Santa Anna reeling back into San Antonio. On the retreat of these dastards they encountered Dawson's company which was trying to reach Captain Caldwell's forces, and, ignoring the white flag which was hoisted in token of surrender, these brave men were put to the sword, only a few escaping to tell the story of Mexican perfidy and of Mexican atrocity. Upon Woll's advent into San Antonio, the call to arms rang out and was borne on the wings of wind from the Gaudalupe to the Brazos, from the Brazos to the Sabine; the blood of Dawson's men cried aloud for vengeance, and Texas hastily responded to the appeal. The call reached me at my home in Brazoria county, and seizing my rifle and mounting my best horse I hurried forward and joined Capt. Shelby McNeal's company and a few days later we reached San Antonio, where we remained in camp several weeks.

I wish to say just here, at the outset, that it is not my purpose to write the Mier expedition, giving in minute detail its causes and fatal results; able writers have faithfully accomplished that task, and all the world has read the harrowing story of Mier, the shocking tragedy of Salado, where seventeen of my comrades were inhumanly put to death by Santa Anna's orders, and of the long and cruel imprisonment of those who were finally driven in chains into the Castle of Perote. For the benefit of my children and those of my countrymen who would preserve the record of suffering and sacrifice of the men who fought for Texas and who laid in blood and tears the foundation of a mighty State, I, the only survivor of the six who escaped from Salado, and amid the evening shadows of a long and eventful life, as-

sume the pleasing task of placing upon record a truthful account of my personal experience as a member of the Mier Expedition, as a Mier prisoner, and my providential escape from Salado, and something of my sufferings while making my way through those inhospitable regions of Northern Mexico, back to Texas and home.

I do not recall the date of our departure from San Antonio for the Rio Grande; suffice it to say that our army, 1,000 to 1,200 strong, under command of General Somervell, set forth and after a tedious march, reached Laredo, where we remained in camp two or three days. The spirit of revenge and retaliation for numberless wrongs was rife among our men, who all the while had been made to believe that we were to be led into the enemy's country for the purpose of administering just and merited chastisement, and when General Somervell broke camp late one evening at Laredo, and took up the line of march in a direction contrary to that of our expectations, loud mutinous murmurings were heard in all the ranks. After marching all night, we halted for breakfast and seeing the discontent and threatening attitude of his men, and the spirit of insubordination that menaced the entire command, Gen. Somervell assembled the army and made a speech, at the conclusion of which he tendered his resignation as commander-in-chief and requested the men to elect his successor, adding that he would continue with the army and would go as far as any man dare go. This later statement seemed so generous and appealed to the boys in such friendly force that they refused to accept the offered resignation, but by almost unanimous vote, continued Somervell as commander of the expedition. After this expression of confidence the general stepped out in an open space, raised a flag and asked all who would pledge obedience to orders to rally to the colors, and all who wished to abandon the expedition and return home were at liberty

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to do so. Five or six hundred men fell in line about the flag, while over three hundred preferred going home, and a short time later, under the leadership of Capt. Bennett took up the line to march for San Antonio.

With Gurrero as our next objective point, we marched down the river and when nearly opposite old Mier, which is three or four miles above the Rio Grande, we crossed to the south bank by swimming the stream and went into camp near town. From this camp General Somervell made a requisition on the town authorities for a large quantity of hats, shoes and blankets, all of which our men stood in great need of, and also a supply of provisions. The alcade of the town agreed to comply with the demand made upon him and his people, only asking that they be granted in which to gather up supplies. The first consignment came up and its inspection brought forth shouts of excitement from some, while others, those of direct need of clothing, stated their disgust in explosions of profanity. The stuff delivered consisted of a lot of old tattered garments that would shame a beggar; the men refused to touch it, and the alcade was told to take it out of our camp, throw it in the river, and then hurry back to town and tell his people they would have to do better, else something was going to happen, right away. With regard to provisions, the alcade put up a doleful tale. He said the country was exhausted, that his own people were on the verge of starvation, and that no supplies were to be had. We remained in camp several days after which with feelings of utter disgust and disappointment General Somervell issued orders to recross the river, and take up the line of march for San Antonio. Safely on the Texas side, we went into camp, and then came a storm of crimination, vituperation, separation and reorganization. Forgetting his pledge that he would go as far as any man in the expedition, General Somervell had determined to abandon the enterprise and return home, but there were restless determined spirits in the army who resolved to follow his leadership no farther. They swore they would never return home until the objects of the expedition had been accomplished, and Tom Green asked Somervell if he ever heard of any

story referring to the French general. So he marched his army up the hill and then halted and marched back down the hill. As I remember those most vehemently opposed to a retrograde movement were Captains Cameron, Pearson, Ryan, Eastland, Buster, Gen. Brown and Dr. Brenham. A call was made for volunteers to carry the war into Mexico, and three hundred fell in line. Colonel Fisher was elected commander and those of my company, Mexicans who remained firm, re-organized and elected Reese as captain. Somervell and his followers started for San Antonio and Fisher's army of 300 resumed the march down the river, selecting the town of Mier as the first point of attack. It being late in December, the country was bare, bleak and desolate, affording little grass for our horses and less subsistence for the men, in consequence of which many of our horses became exhausted and had to be abandoned. This spared some thirty men on foot, but unfortunately for these footmen, Gen. Tom Green discovered two flat boats which the Mexicans had attempted to conceal along the river; these were "holystoned," rigged up and put in commission, the footmen were taken aboard, a red flag was hoisted, and "Commodore" Green, with his new navy, set sail down the Rio Grande. Army and fleet kept pace, and at nightfall the "Commodore" would move to, east anchor, land his Marines and camp with the land forces, adding to our depleted commissary any supplies he may have captured during the day's cruise. And thus we continued until we reached a point opposite the town of Mier. Here, I should state that during the descent, we encountered a few of the inhabitants; there were only a few ranches on the Texas side; these had been abandoned and the stock driven off. Green's boatmen came upon a few while foraging on the Mexican side along the river, but these had little or nothing worth taking and none of them could or would give any information as to whether or not there were any Mexican troops in the country.

On the evening of the 21st we went into camp opposite Mier, four or five miles distant, on the following morning we crossed the river and marched into town; where a requisition for clothing and provisions was made on the alcade.

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The response was prompt and energetic; the contributions were piled in heaps and heaps on the plaza until Fisher soon found he had more than he expected and having no means of transportation to remove the supplies, an agreement was had in which it was stipulated that the goods should be delivered at our camp on the following morning. We then returned to our camp on the east bank of the river, taking the alcalde along with us as security for the faithful performance of the contract. The next day was spent patiently waiting for the promised supplies, likewise the day following, and no supplies came. Meantime Captain Baker and spies had been kept on the lookout on the south side of the river and on Christmas eve they captured a Mexican from whom it was learned that Gen. Ampudia with a large force had reached Mier and had forbidden the fulfillment of the alcalde's promise. On learning this, we left our horses and camp outfit in charge of a detail of forty men, crossed the river and by 4 o'clock in the afternoon we were on the march for Mier, determined to board the lion in his den. We had not gone far when we came in sight of the Mexicans, who had marched out to meet us, but when they saw us they fell back to the town.

General Green with his "marines" led the advance, and at nightfall we reached the outskirts of Mier, and were halted on the banks of the little river, the Alcantra I believe they called it, which in the darkness seemed impassable for footmen. While General Green and others were searching for a crossing, Joe Berry fell from a high bank and sustained a broken thigh. He was carried and placed in a deserted jacal nearby and left in charge of Dr. Sinnickson, Bate Berry and six others. General Green soon found a crossing and we moved forward under a heavy fire, reaching one of the main streets leading to the plaza where the enemy's artillery and main forces seemed to be stationed. The old alcalde whom we held as hostage, had been placed in the care of an old Irish sea captain named Lyons. When we had crossed the Alcantra, General Green happened alongside of Lyons and, not seeing the alcalde, asked as to his whereabouts. "Shure sor, an he's gone adhr-rift!" replied the old sea dog. A

laugh and a cheer rang down the line as we hurried along.

The firing of grape, which swept the street forced us to take shelter around the corners, where we would load our rifles, then between fires, or while the enemy was reloading, we would rush out and on to the next corner. Early in the night a light rain set in, and in order to keep our powder dry, we entered the houses along the street and chopped our way through the walls until daylight found us within close rifle shot of the plaza.

The Mexican soldiers covered the flat roofs of the houses, many of whom were directly over our heads when we entered the lower apartments, but when it became light enough to draw a bead on those in sight we punched loopholes in the walls and soon silenced the artillery for the time being and drove the yellow rascals from the roofs. The Mexicans rallied and the firing continued until about noon. I do not remember the number we lost during this time. A comrade by the name of Jones was killed by my side; Colonel Fisher was severely wounded and there were others, but I have forgotten their names. During the progress of this fighting or earlier in the day a party of Mexicans surrounded the jacal in which we had left Joe Berry with a broken thigh. His brother, Bate Berry, Dr. Sinnickson, and others were made prisoners, but as Joe Berry was unable to walk, he was murdered at the very feet of his pleading brother, who later escaped a like fate by drawing a white bean at Salado, lived through a long captivity at Perote, returned home, and when the war with Mexico and the United States broke out, was among the first to enlist under Jack Hays, and with tiger-like ferocity fought on many fields to avenge his brother's murder.

About 1 o'clock the Mexicans made a desperate charge, but were repulsed. During this charge I think every Texan rifle was loaded, primed and ready for service, and every shot fired brought down a Mexican. The repulse was swift, bloody and complete, as I thought, and the cheers of our boys almost shook the town. A little after this repulse Dr. Sinnickson, who was then a prisoner, was sent under a white flag to us, and on his appearance we were ordered to cease firing. A moment later several Mexican

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officers rode forward and called for Col. Fisher. The Colonel met them and, after a long parley, he returned with the announcement that he had been summoned to surrender under the promise that we should be treated as prisoners of war, that we should not be sent to Mexico, but held on the Rio Grande border until exchanged, or until peace was declared, and that we had just one hour to decide, and if the terms of surrender proposed by them were not accepted in that time we would be shown no quarter.

I have no language to describe the scene of confusion that followed this announcement. The older men, those who had fought at San Jacinto or had lost friends or relatives at the Alamo and Goliad, became furious and denounced those in favor of surrender as cowards and traitors. They argued that our advance so far had been one of triumph, that we had whipped the enemy back from the start, and now had Ampudia badly beaten, and that he had resorted to strategy on order to frighten us into surrender. And thus the muddle continued until the hour had almost expired. Some wanted to fight to the last ditch, others wanted to continue the fight until night and try to make our escape under cover of darkness. Those from the States, and the weaker element, who had small grievances and who had yet to learn of Mexican perfidy, favored surrendering, and began to stack their arms on the plaza. Seeing this, Captain Cameron made a final appeal and proposed that if as many as 100 men would stand by him he would lead them out even if he had to cut their way through the enemy's line. Only about sixty responded, and it was then decided that the number was too small, and the entire command yielded as prisoners of war. This fatal mistake was made on the evening of Christmas Day, 1842. In this action we lost sixteen killed, including those who died later of their wounds, besides twenty-six more or less severely wounded, out of a total of 261 that went into battle. I never learned how many the Mexicans lost; they held us in Mier until the following Saturday, nearly a week, and during much of the time they were digging graves and burying their dead, and from this we estimated that they must have lost at least, 500 killed outright, and, counting the wounded,

which must have been double the number killed, would show that each Texan killed or wounded three Mexicans, and if we had been allowed to continue the fight a few hours longer we would have wiped out Ampudia and his entire army, whose numerical strength was given as 2,000 men.

On Saturday the last day of the old year, we started on a long march to Matamoras, leaving our wounded in Mier in charge of Dr. Sinnickson. We were guarded by Ampudia's whole army, and at Camargo we were held up one day while each man's name, nativity, age and occupation was placed upon record. When we reached the next town Reynosa, we were halted on the outskirts of the miserable village, in order to allow the artillery to move forward, take position and fire salvos in honor of the immortal Ampudia and his great victory over the hated Tejanos. Finally, when all were in readiness, we marched into town, where we found triumphal arches on the only street, and these were adorned with every species of childish tawdry. The rabble lined the street and flat roofs and shouted themselves hoarse; now in laudation of the benemerito, Ampudia, and next, hurling anathemas at the Texas prisoners.

When the general entered the plaza he was preceded by about a dozen boys togged out in what these barbarians considered holiday costumes, and these little friskies danced, or rather capered, before his mightiness while he, with his prisoners, marched three times around the filth-laden plaza. All during this time there was a babble of noise, the firing of cannon, the blare of nerve racking music and the strident shouts of the multitude. At the close of this patriotic demonstration the general and his staff, led by a few sleek old priests, entered the church, where they went through some sort of ceremony, thanksgiving I suppose.

From Reynosa we were marched to Matamoras, a long and painful journey, and when we reached that place another triumphal reception awaited the "conquering hero." We were held there three days and during the time Major Oldham sent for an Englishman, then a resident of Matamoras, and whom he had formerly known in Kentucky. This generous acquaintance came promptly, and he

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loaned Major Oldham \$100 and advanced to the prisoners the sum of \$2,000. In addition to this he gave as a free gift \$5 to each man that chanced to be from Kentucky. From Matamoras on January 14, we started for Monterey in charge of General Canales with a guard of 600 men. This march was marked with no unusual incidents save the sufferings of the weary, footsore prisoners who, all the while, were planning among themselves to make a break for liberty. We arrived at Monterey on the 29th, and remained until February 2, when we set out for Saltillo in charge of General Barragan and 350 men, all raw troops except a company of regulars, whom we soon learned to call Red Caps. During all this journey we were seldom free from the pangs of hunger, our daily allowance being a small piece of lean beef which had been boiled. This was doled out to us in a pint of water in which the meat had been cooked with a few grains of rice and a few beans. This stuff, and a small piece of dry, stale bread, was issued twice a day to each man and was barely sufficient to ward off starvation. Those who had shared the bounty of the generous Englishman at Matamoras fared better. There was no dearth of peddlers along our route. Our coming seemed to have been heralded far in advance, and every old palado that could scrape together a few eggs, tortillas, goat milk or goat milk cheese, got out on the road to wait our coming, and those who had the money could buy, while the moneyless man had to resort to stealing. And if the man without money got to the peddler first the latter soon found his stock entirely exhausted: he was soon surrounded by the friendliest people in the world, who oggled him clear away from his basket of goods, and when he carried his complaint to the officers they treated it as a huge joke—on the pelado.

The plotting continued. We lay over at Saltillo one day and then resumed our journey toward the City of Mexico—and Perote. Seventy-five miles from Saltillo we reached a station called Hacienda Salado. Here we came up with Colonel Fisher, General Green, Dr. Sheppard and their interpreter, Dan Henry, and also the old sea captain, Lyons, whom Gen. Green had proclaimed as his body servant. These officers had been sent

forward in order to keep them separate from us, but now since having penetrated far into the interior, Mexican vigilance seems to have relaxed to a certain extent, and that evening we were corraled some of these officers were allowed to visit us for a short time.

On arriving at this Hacienda Salado we were marched into an enclosure, the walls of which were eight, probably ten feet in height. This enclosure more properly speaking, corral, was divided into two pens or compartments, and into the smaller of these we were placed, while the larger was occupied by the infantry guards. The entrance to the pen assigned us opened into the compartment where the guards were bivouacked, and as soon as we all had passed in sentinels were placed at this entrance. The soldiers stacked their arms against the south wall, every movement being closely observed by keen watchful eyes.

At the opposite end of the enclosure, and built into the wall, was a house, with doorways leading from the main corral to the outside. The red caps took up quarters in this house for the night. During the brief visit of our officers, as before mentioned they were assured that if we made the break next morning as contemplated, we would certainly attack their escort and effect their release, but it seems that the Mexicans became suspicious and left with their prisoners before we made the stampede. At all events they were not far away, since General Green says in his History of the Mier Expedition that he heard our yells and the firing, and that he and his fellow prisoners were pushed forward with all speed, traveling seventy-five miles before they were allowed to halt. But to return to the men in the corral. It was the night of February 10. There was a chill in the air, and as night advanced a cold wind swept down from the Sierras. We had few blankets and we had been given only a slender supply of wood to light a fire. Before taps there was the usual amount of merriment among the boys, and it appeared to me that the spirit of fun and repartee ran with greater exuberance than on any former occasion, even to the extent that it attracted notice on the part of some of our guards, and one of the petty officers came in and asked Captain Cameron the cause of the general good humor.

He was told that it was in view of the near approach of St. Valentine's, our saint's day, which we always celebrated with great rejoicing and hilarity, since it never failed to bring good fortune.

Long before daylight on the morning of the 11th, I rose and made a small fire, and while trying to "thaw out," my benumbed limbs I was joined by others, Dr. Brenham and Mr. Copeland. In whispers we began to discuss our chances for a break that morning, and I expressed the opinion that the effort would not be made, that as heretofore, somebody would weaken because of the fearful hazard and the long distance from Texas, and also the fearful odds in point of the numbers against us, "but," said I, "if the break is made, I will be among the first in the charge, and I believe I can go as far as any man." Mr. Copeland said that the agreement to stampede was sure and binding and that we would run over guards as if they were a gang of hoodlums, and that we would get out in the mountains and live on the fat of the land. Dr. Cameron had been a Santa Fe prisoner and said if he was taken to the City of Mexico he would be recognized and immediately ordered to execution. "The break will be made this morning," said he, "if I have to make it all alone and single handed; I would rather die fighting like a man, here, than to be led out and shot like a felon at Perote."

Few of us gave heed to the chill of the morning air. The murky dawn announced the approach of a great crisis, and it found the men ready, eager and waiting for the signal. There was no unusual movement observable among the men: there was a total absence of that spirit of levity and good-natured badinage that had prevailed the evening before; a silence that presaged the coming of a great event in our lives prevailed: the men stood in groups, or sauntered in apparent listlessness about the narrow confines of our prison as dumb, submissive cattle, waiting the coming of the pound master to dole out the morning provender. Men looked into each others' faces with inquiring eyes and real decision in every countenance, and grim determination in every eye. Our shackles were to be broken, the grave had less terrors than the dungeons of Perote, our backs were to be turned towards Santa Anna's boasted capital, and our faces

toward home, Texas, and liberty. What greater incentive to brave men to daring deeds! I saw men grasp each others' hands in silence, as if in greeting, encouragement, congratulation, or a final farewell, each seemingly realizing that the narrow band of time was swiftly approaching the stroke of doom, or the elapse of freedom for over 200 brave men. It was a scene fit to arouse the war gods of antiquity, and to command the admiration of the world. The Spartans at Thermopylae were led by tried and experienced officers and in their hands swords, spears and lances; the immortals who were slain in the Alamo stood behind walls of masonry while their unerring eyes glared along the gleaming barrels of the deadly rifles. The Captives of Mier, cold, hungry, their emaciated forms clad in rags that fluttered in responsive salute to the mountains' chilling breath, those stood in expectant silence awaiting the signal to spring upon a vigilant, heavily-armed foe. Weapons? Bare hands, more deft in the arts of peace than implements of warfare. Armor? Rugged breasts that never quaked with fear always turned to the enemy, and faces that never blanched in the presence of danger. But these coarse, branny hands were not without missiles and rude implements of hurtling design. Let me relate one instance: At Saltillo, one of our guards, derisively, cast at Bate Berry's feet an old cast-off infantryman's jacket, a mass of tatters that, ordinarily, a rag picker would have kicked aside. Ever on the alert, Berry took it up and finding one of the sleeves portable in fact, removed it and concealed it underneath the folds of his own ill-fated raiment. With this ready stone and a small round stone, weighing about one pound, he fashioned a sling-shot, and with this rude and primitive weapon he brained two of the guards when the break was made—his first blood offering on the altar of revenge.

All eyes were fixed upon Sam Walker and Captain Ryan as they carelessly advanced towards the doorway leading into the compartment occupied by the guard. Captain Ryan after looking through the gateway, turned and said something to those who stood near, and the word was soon whispered around: "Too late, the Red Caps were already under arms!" Ryan and Walker still

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stood in the doorway as if waiting while Capt. Cameron stood a few steps directly in their rear. The sun was rising, the silence most oppressive, and the suspense amounted to torture. Suddenly Capt. Cameron threw off his hat and pushing up his sleeves, his face aflame with a strange light, shouted: "Now is your time! Come on, boys!" With Walker at his side, these two were the first to rush through the gateway, each grappling with a sentinel whom they disarmed and knocked down. With piercing shouts and deafening yells our men poured through the gateway, crushing the feeble resistance offered until they reached the stack of arms at the south wall; this point reached, and seeing us in possession of their guns, the guards either begged quarter or fled precipitately through the front gateway. A few stoutly resisted, but these were knocked down, run over, disarmed and a few killed. It was here that Berry got in his deadly work with his sling-shot. When I got to the stack of guns I grabbed a short musket, but imagine my chagrin when we found that the guns were not loaded. During this brief time the Red Caps were firing, but it seemed more like a rambling, desultory fire, without any particular aim, and when we had seized the guns and were making a rush for the ammunition, these valiant Red Caps took to flight, joined by the Infantry, or those who had succeeded in getting out of our reach. As I passed through this main entrance I saw the brave Dr. Brenham and a man by the name of Lyons lying dead. Both had been Santa Fe prisoners, and had fallen as they emerged from the enclosure. One or two others whose names I do not recall, had been killed near them.

It required only a brief moment to supply ourselves with ammunition, and seeing the Mexicans scampering off in every direction a rush was made for their horses which were being held near by. Of these we captured about 100 head, sufficient to mount less than half of our men. Five of our men were killed in this action and a number wounded. We paroled our prisoners with the distinct understanding that the wounded we would be compelled to leave should receive humane care and treatment. We spent a couple of hours burying our fallen comrades, making our wounded—

those in the left behind—as comfortable as possible, collecting ammunition, provisions and other things that would prove useful on our journey. Next to the arms and horses our most important capture was the military chest, which contained \$1,400.

Along about 10 o'clock we faced about and read for the time of march for home and Texas. We took turn about riding and walking and with radiant faces resumed the route we had followed after leaving Saltillo, and during the remainder of that day and a few hours of night travel we covered the distance that required two days' travel while under guard. In other words, we halted at a point where we had camped two nights before. Then, finding a house well filled with food, we fed our horses, ate supper, re-mounted and proceeded about six miles and went into camp. The next morning, finding ourselves within about ten miles of Saltillo, a halt was called and the question submitted as to whether we should leave the main road and try to make our escape through the mountains or resume our present course and take chances on cutting our way through. Our more sagacious leaders opposed leaving the main highway. They readily admitted the force of the argument advanced by those in favor of the mountain route. True, they said, the news of our escape will travel on the wings of the wind, a large force will doubtless be sent to intercept us at Saltillo, and even should we get past the town in safety, every mile of the road to the Rio Grande will be beset with dangers. But in the face of this, consider what we have accomplished this day. With bare hands we have overcome our enemies, three to one, captured their arms, we ought to vanquish any number of convict soldiers Santa Anna may send against us. Take to the mountains they argued, and we are lost. We would have to encounter all the extremes of heat and cold, traverse trackless wastes, climb lofty heights, follow the wanderings of boulder-strewn canyons and hew our way across arid plains set with forests of hurting cactus, without food without water, with absolutely no hope of escape.

The question was put to a vote and a majority stood in favor of the mountain route. Fatal decision!

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The break at Salado was made February 11, 1843, and after leaving the road and directing our wandering steps into the mountains, I soon lost all reckoning as to dates.

Leaving Saltillo to the right, we struck into the mountains, and for two days we traveled over abandoned trails and roads. In the afternoon of the third day we came to a small station occupied by a few soldiers. Captain Cameron sent John Brennan forward to ask if we could obtain water and provisions, but when he approached within hailing distance he was ordered away on pain of being shot, learning of which Cameron decided it best to proceed without further disturbance. The next day we came to another military post, and as we approached, the occupants opened a brisk fire upon us at a distance of at least 500 yards. "Convicts," said Patrick Mahan, "just out of the penitentiary, and the officers want them to get used to the sound of their own guns, which are about as safe at one end as at the other, and little harm in either."

We did not return their weakling fire but passed on. The next morning we struck a road, and after traveling some distance, came to water and went into camp, and while resting at this point an Englishman, accompanied by a Mexican officer came to us and inquired for our leader. Captain Cameron was pointed out, and after introducing himself and discovering that Cameron was a Scotchman, the Briton became quite communicative and displayed the most friendly solicitude for our well-being. He said he knew the country, and gave Cameron explicit directions with regard to the route he should pursue, and on parting offered the Captain a well filled purse as an earnest of his friendship. This was politely declined the Captain informing him that he already possessed ample funds for present wants. All the while, the Mexican maintained silence, and after their departure we were unable to surmise the object of his coming unless he came as a spy. However, we followed the Englishman's directions until towards night, when certain signs and surroundings led us to conclude that he was a treacherous rascal, a villainous spy in the pay of Santa Anna, and that his object was to lead us into a snare. Whereupon we abandoned the route designated

by the Englishman, and the day following we ascended to the summit of a high mountain, and from our lofty elevation we discovered a canyon, which, having its source near the base of the mountain, stretched away toward the east, the course we wanted to pursue. We made our way down the rugged side of this mountain and entered the canyon, and it seemed the farther we advanced the higher the perpendicular walls of granite grew and the more broken and difficult the surface of the boulder-strewn floor, with here and there breaks or falls of two to four feet at first, but increasing in height, or rather depth, as we proceeded. Over a number of these it became necessary to push our horses, which was rather perilous, and a few of the poor animals sustained severe bruises and confusions in the operation. Having passed one of these declivities of six feet perpendicular fall, we came to one of at least fifteen feet, forming a barrier that forbade all hope of further advance with our horses. The six-foot wall was just behind us, at our feet was a fifteen-foot precipice; we could neither advance nor retrace our steps; we could only kill our faithful horses. It was a sad, heart-rending ordeal, and touched the most obdurate heart. These patient animals had borne us thus far, and even now, while we were planning their destruction in their famished condition, their gentle lustrous eyes were turned upon us appealingly for relief. But there was no alternative; we also were threatened with starvation, and the sacrifice had to be made. The die was cast, the horses were slaughtered, and some of the men drank their warm blood in order to relieve their consuming thirst. As the meat of these horses was being prepared for transportation, some of the men went down the canyon in search of water, which was found in a basin two miles below. The quantity was small, about two barrels, and I made two trips with as many Spanish gourds as I could carry when filled. In those days the Spanish gourd was used instead of the canteen. Here a division was made of the \$1.400 we had captured, my portion amounting to \$7.00.

From this point of desolation we resumed our march, each man carrying a supply of raw horse meat. Ours was a dry camp that night and we traveled all

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next day without water. In the afternoon of that day Captain Cameron directed that those having sufficient strength remaining should scour the country to the right and left of our course and search for water, while he, with those so nearly exhausted, would move forward to a designated mountain peak in the distance, where we would all rendezvous. I went with the squad that turned to the right and after a fruitless search we ascended the mountain and waited until all the men came up. From this point we saw in our front a broad valley with a lofty range of mountains beyond, and in this valley there was a small round mountain, which Captain Cameron pointed out and said we would leave that elevation on our left.

Water! water! was the cry of the famishing men, and some, through sheer exhaustion, had thrown away their guns and blankets. We descended the mountain. I among the foremost, and when I reached the valley my thirst was so intense that I struck out alone in search of water, and finding none, went to the top of the little round mountain, where I had an excellent view of the surrounding country, but discovered no indications of water anywhere. It was a vast picture of aridity and desolation. Bordering on despair, I threw my blanket over a bush to shelter me from the scorching rays of the sun and lay down in the shade thus afforded to await the coming of Cameron. In a short time Jack Johnson and Gibson came up. The evening was far advanced and as Cameron failed to appear, we concluded that he had changed his course and gone in the direction of a mountain pass that we could see northeast of us.

A little to the left of that gap or pass we could see two very high peaks with a low elevation between them, and realizing the probability that this pass or gap would be guarded, we decided that we would avoid the pass and attempt to cross over the low swell between the two peaks. Acting upon this decision we three set out and traveled the remainder of the day and night, our famished condition rendering our progress slow and extremely painful. A heavy fog prevailed next morning, somewhat to our relief, and as we entered a small valley we suddenly came upon four of our comrades, Ackerman, Arthur, Cash and Jim Neely. Our little squad now

numbered seven and we pushed on in the direction of the peaks until noon, when we halted, and while trying to press a little moisture from the piths of a species of dagger tree Gibson wandered away and was lost—delirious of thirst and hardship.

We six finally reached the base of the mountain and during the night made the ascent, reaching the summit an hour or two before daylight. Here we lay down and slept, and during my sleep I had one of those peculiar dreams experienced, it is said only by those on the verge of dissolution from thirst and starvation. I was being welcomed at home, and was at a great feast prepared by generous relatives and friends. Long tables laden with viands, rich, rare and bounteous, were before me, and I was urged to eat. I craved water, only water, and when this was forthcoming I emptied each jar as it was brought to me and called for more. Each draught seemed to inflame my thirst, and yet on one of the vast company seemed astonished at the amount of water I drank. My thirst was unquenchable.

From this tantalizing creature of a distempered brain I awoke at daylight. We dragged our emaciated bodies down the mountain side and as we reached the plain we glanced up to the right and our eager eyes caught the silver sheen of a waterfall. Glorious vision! We hastened around the point of the mountain and came to a beautiful stream of clear, cold water. We had been four days without this life-preserving element, and here we rested during the remainder of the day, drinking and bathing and feasting on the now partially spoiled horse meat that yet remained.

Leaving this stream we proceeded on our eastward course, and after traveling quite a distance we discovered a man on foot pursuing a road that led northward, and on taking our bearings we found that we were near the entrance to a pass through which the road led and fearing to go through this pass during the daytime, we went into concealment and lay by until nightfall, after which we entered the pass, where we found water, and while replenishing our water gourds a horseman passed near us, going northward. As soon as he passed out of hearing we followed, and after proceeding about a mile we emerged from

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the pass and entered a valley. Jim Neely had remained a short distance behind as a sort of rear guard, and when we had gone some distance in the valley he came up and said some one was dogging our steps. On this notice we moved off about forty yards from the road and waited developments. The moon was shining, and presently a footman came along. When opposite where we lay he halted, and after a moment as if listening, he called out in a low tone of voice: "Boys, where are you?" The stranger proved to be Major Oldham, and I never saw a man so overjoyed to get back into good, but very forlorn, company. The Major reported as follows: "I remained with Capt. Cameron two days after you left him and from the time of your departure the men maddened with thirst, began to wander off, singly and in groups, searching for water. No persuasion, no advice or counsel could deter them; they were crazed with burning, consuming thirst, the Mexicans picking them up here and there. Captain Pearson, with eleven men, myself included, became separated from the others and while searching for water, I and Thompson being considerably in the rear, a squad of cavalry surrounded Pearson, capturing him and the men with him. The Mexicans failed to see us, and hence our narrow escape. When this cavalcade had gone I and Thompson proceeded in quest of water, and when we came to a pass in the mountains we discovered a Mexican camp. By this time Thompson was wild and said there was water in that camp and he was going to get it. I tried to dissuade him, but to no effect. He was determined and, giving me his gun and ammunition, we shook hands and he was off. This occurred during the night, and to avoid discovery, when daylight came I concealed myself in a deep gully and remained there all day, my position being in full view of the Mexican camp. About sundown a large body of Mexican cavalry passed near me, going in the direction of the gap in the mountain where they went into camp. This occupancy of the gap forced me to climb the mountain in order to evade the enemy thus placed on guard, and when I had accomplished this toilsome feat I descended into the gap, where I found water the first I had obtained in five

days. After satisfying to some extent my thirst I filled my only water vessel, a tin cup, and resumed my journey northward and continued until overcome with exhaustion. I dropped down and slept until morning, and when I awoke a bird was sitting on my breast almost splitting his little throat with his morning song. When I moved he flew away, and I regarded the incident as being a good omen; it gave me new courage and I resumed my travels with a lighter heart and continued until I overtook you boys."

With the arrival of Major Oldham our party again numbered seven, and pushing ahead, we traveled the remainder of that night and all next day without water. Late in the evening we came to an arroyo where we expected to find more water, but not a drop was to be found. After resting awhile Johnson and Cash proposed going up the arroyo as far as a designated point, where they would remain in waiting for us while we explored certain gulches that led off in the direction indicated. They firmly believed that water could be found somewhere in that vicinity. Later, when we reached the point designated, a small elevation, these two men were nowhere to be seen, and made no response to our repeated calls. With heavy hearts we went forward. I loved Cash, and it grieved me to lose him in that impossible wilderness, and my grief was greatly intensified long afterward when I learned that he was among those recaptured who drew the black bean at Salado and was cruelly murdered.

Our little squad of wanderers was now reduced to five and that night, still being without water, we lay down and slept until morning, when, upon rising, we discovered that we were at the head of two "draws" or valleys. Mr. Ackerman said he would follow down the one on right while we moved down along that on the left, and that we would meet at the confluence of the two, which did not seem very far distant. We never saw Mr. Ackerman again. On reaching the confluence of the two valleys, we waited and called repeatedly, but receiving no answer and giving him up for lost, we continued our course, our number now being reduced to four, and after having traveled several hours

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we came to a dry arroyo, where we found cattle tracks, which gave us the assurance that water was near at hand. Following the cattle sign up the arroyo we had not gone far when Major Oldham and Mr. Arthur yielded to exhaustion. Leaving them with the promise that if we found water we would return to their succor, I and Neely pushed forward but we had not proceeded very far when I also had to fall by the wayside. Neely left me to continue the search, and in about half an hour I heard his signal announcing the discovery of water. He hurried back with the good tidings, and related having seen an old bull at the watering place, which he said I must kill, as we needed beef. While Neely went to the relief of Major Oldham and Arthur I managed to reach the water hole, which I found contained very little water. However, with my hands I scraped out a basin in the yielding mud and clay and soon had a bountiful supply. Meanwhile my three comrades had come up, and after a short rest Neely borrowed the Major's gun and we set out to kill the old bull, which we succeeded in doing after having fired three shots and engaging in almost a hand to hand fight, before bringing him down. In the entire party there was only one knife, an old worn out pocket knife, and with this makeshift we found it a laborious task removing sufficient hide to enable us to carve out a few chunks of meat.

We remained there two days and nights, resting, recuperating, drying meat, feasting on tough roasts and repairing our footwear with bull hide. Major Oldham mended his gun stock which Jim Neely had broken over the head of the old bull.

We left this camp greatly refreshed late one evening and during the night Neely and Arthur became separated from us. Discovering their absence we ascended a high ridge nearby and called, shouted, fired our gun and waited, but they did not answer, and we two, Major Oldham and I, were forced to proceed without them, and pedging ourselves to stay together, even to the end, we set forth, persuaded that those brave men who had separated from us did so through choice, preferring to take chances alone rather than risk themselves in the company with others,, and

on the principle that one man can pass unobserved through a country easier than a party of men.

That night we rested in a stony valley that trended northward, and this we followed through the day, passing large forests of pine and oak. Late in the evening we came to the head of this valley and next morning we reached the top of a mountain, from which we saw in the distance cattle grazing in a valley that lay in front. We descended into this valley and, after a toilsome day's travel, went into camp, as usual, without water. During the night a 'possum visited us, was captured, and, after going a short distance next morning, we found water, roasted our 'possum, made a cup of horsemint tea, and feasted; our supply of bull beef having been exhausted. That evening we reached a stream and along toward sundown we saw cattle coming to water. Here was a chance for more beef, and taking my stand near a deep cut or trail in the bank, I waited until a nice, fat two-year-old heifer came along and shot her. We built a fire and began barbecuing the meat which we found far more palatable than our late ration of bull beef.

Here let me say, that from this time until we reached San Antoino, my narrative cannot recollect dates and details of each day's travel. We had lost all record of time.

Loading ourselves with a good supply of nice beef, we broke camp and traveled three days in a northeast course, without water. At last we came to a dry arroyo and, following it some distance down stream, we came to high bluff beneath which was a depression. With my hands I scraped out a small pit in this depression and soon had a supply of water. After satisfying our thirst we noticed a number of bees swarming around the water and I soon obtained a "bee course" following which about 200 yards below, I discovered a bee cave in the wall of the arroyo, about eight feet from the base. With Major Oldham's bayonet we scooped out all the honey our tin cups would hold and went into camp. Either from eating too much honey or from the effects of the bee stings, the Major came near dying that night, but by morning relief came and he was able to stir around. Removing his goatskin leggings, he tied

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the lower ends, revisited the bee cave and filled them with honey for future use.

Late in the afternoon, next day after leaving our bee camp, we came into a road, and a few minutes later we were overtaken by a young Mexican on horseback. In response to our inquiries he said he lived on the road about a league distant. He seemed quite obliging, gave us some leaf tobacco and a cake of bread, and refused the offer of pay, saying that all our wants would be supplied and kind hospitality accorded us on reaching his home. His seeming generosity so far wrought upon the major that, over my protest, he allowed him to carry his gun, the Major hardly able to walk because of physical exhaustion; the riddance of the burdensome gun was a great relief. Darkness overtaking us, I told the major he must recover his gun, that that Mexican, like all others of his class, was a rascal. The major yielded, and when he asked for his "shootin' iron" the Mexican put spurs to his horse, and that was the last of the major's old musket. A few minutes later we heard the barking of dogs and from this we inferred that the Mexican had reached home. The night was intensely dark, with a misting rain, and we could scarcely follow the road, but moved forward until we found ourselves in what seemed to be a village, or a large ranch, judging from the number of lights that issued from a number of doors and windows. To avoid discovery, we turned off to the left and entered an irrigated field where, for some time we floundered around in mud, slime, and ditches, until we came at a late hour to a rippling stream about forty yards wide and rather deep. We forded this river with great difficulty, as the water was over waist deep and very swift. Being much taller in stature, I had to carry our scant baggage over and then return and assist the major. We next found ourselves in a dense swamp, and, finding a place comparatively dry, we halted and slept until morning. Rising early we proceeded on our way, and that evening we found ourselves in a sheep range and coming up with a herder, we took charge of him and tried to purchase a sheep, which he positively refused to sell, saying they were not his property and that he had no authority to dispose of even one

sheep. We gave him to understand that we were hungry and were going to have a mutton, and with certain very effective powers of persuasion we induced him to catch the fattest finest sheep in the flock, one of our own selection. For his trouble we gave him the head and hide, paying him a dollar for the sheep. I also gave him 25 cents for an old sway-back butcher knife, which I lost a few days later. We asked this honest simpleton many questions which, I believe, he answered correctly in so far as his very limited knowledge extended. We told him we were on our way to Kendalia, but when beyond his sight we changed our course, went into camp on a river and barbecued our mutton.

From this place we traveled two days and nights without water, and on the second day while resting, prone upon the ground, we heard a low, sullen roar, the source of which we decided was a little to the right of our course. We also decided that it was the sound of a waterfall, which it proved to be. Pushing on down the mountain through the darkness, we reached the falls of a beautiful river, where we camped, made a cup of mint tea and devoured the last of our mutton supply.

Continuing up the river valley the next day, late in the afternoon we found ourselves in another sheep range, and while seeking the shepherd we came upon his shanty and flock pens. We entered this jacal, or shanty, took possession and made ourselves quite at home. Looking around we found a mug of goat's milk and a small supply of tortillas, which we promptly transferred to the department of the interior. We also found about three quarts of shelled corn and a small amount of mutton suet which found lodgement in our wallets. This was all in the way of provisions, we could find; among other things, in the herdsman's wardrobe I found a pair of tanned goat skin pants, all complete save the waistband. Of my old pants all that remained was the waist band. These new pants fitted me to a fraction, and, splicing them on my old waistband. I went forth as proud as any boy with his first pair of breeches. A bunch of kids were playing about the pens and we tried to secure one of these, but failed on account of our extreme weakness from hunger and hardships. Leaving

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this ranch and going some distance, we found a secluded place where we lighted a fire, parched a supply of corn in the embers, and that, with the mutton suet, formed the menu for our supper, which we greatly enjoyed.

Before us was a river, and to get across this deep stream was our next task. We soon came to a point where there was an island, where we found a fallen tree across the other channel, which was quite deep, and on this foot-log we passed safely to the opposite shore and without water we traveled the two days following, and on the third day a furious norther blew up, and owing to the intense cold we were forced to lay by a day and night, following there came a heavy frost, and after this had cleared away we set forward and late that evening I became deathly sick. Major Oldham made a fire and did all he could for my relief, but I steadily grew worse, and believing that my hour had come, I begged him to leave me and try to make his way through, that we were starving, and it would be folly for him to waste time in a hopeless case. He reminded me of our pledge to stand by each other through all danger, and that he would not violate that obligation. During the day following the Major's attack of illness at the bee cave camp, he came upon an herb which was in great repute among the housewives in Texas as being a sovereign remedy for a great variety of ills. This herb, he said was balmona, and he pulled up a handful and stowed it away in his wallet for use in case of an emergency. When he found that my case was really serious he thought of his herb and brewed a cup of the most villainous compound I ever tasted. In a short time it took effect, and the effect was nearly as fierce as the disease, but it brought me around, and by morning I was able to move about. In the afternoon I was able to travel at a slow gait and an reaching an elevation we could see ahead of us a long belt of timber, and when within about a mile of this timber, we discovered a couple of deer, and taking my gun, Oldham managed by stealth to kill one of these, which we carried to the timber which as we surmised, was on the bank of a large bold river. It being near night we went into camp, and while I went to the river to get water the Major roasted the

deer's liver and some venison. We had no salt, but the viands were savory and greatly relished. Going down to the river bank next morning, we decided that we had reached the Rio Grande and joy filled our souls as we gazed upon the opposite shore and said to each other, "That is grand old Texas!" We traveled down the river two days seeking means of crossing, and on the morning of the third day we came to an old stock pen built of poles. We were elated over the find and proceeded to make a raft. When it was completed, Major Oldham mounted the front end of our raft, while I took station aft, and with poles we launched forth on our voyage and landed safely in Texas. Removing our slim cargo we set the raft adrift and continued our course, down the valley, and on the second day we discovered signs which convinced us that we were approaching a settlement. We bore to the left, being satisfied that we were near Laredo, and it was our plan to leave the town to the right and, if possible, to get into the San Antonio road. It was now night, and there being so many roads we became confused, and crossed the one we were seeking without being aware that it was the San Antonio route, so we decided to halt. Next morning we heard a church bell, which seemed close by, and found ourselves near the river below town. Taking our bearings, we set out, and soon came to a road that seemed to lead in the right direction, and while deliberating on the advisability of following this road, a Mexican rode up within forty yards of us, halted, and while eyeing us, I called out, "Buenas dias, amigo!" whereupon he wheeled his horse and fled with all speed back the way he came, toward town. Just then we concluded that we could get along without a road, and turning eastward, we proceeded a dense chaparral, satisfied that the pelado who had discovered us would soon have a gang of his companeros at our heels. After going about ten miles we came to a creek which we recognized as one we had crossed during our march to Laredo, and nightfall being at hand, we went into camp. The next morning, after proceeding about two hundred yards, we came to the San Antonio road. Before entering this road we peered cautiously up and down the road to see

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if the way was clear, and about four hundred yards north of us we saw a Mexican standing near his horse as if waiting for some one. We, seeing no way to get around him, concealed ourselves in a gulch nearby, which emptied into the creek. From this hiding place we watched the Mexican, and after waiting a short while he mounted and rode down to the creek and watered his horse within twenty steps of us, then rode up on the bank, dismounted, and lay down while his horse was allowed to graze. He was not thirty steps away. We could almost hear him breathing, and we decided to arrest him, take him along for a day's travel and then turn him loose, afoot. We needed his horse. Just as we were about to carry this plan into effect, a large party of Mexicans were seen coming down the road from the direction this Mexican had come. Being in the gulch, well hidden by the tall grass, we hugged the ground, now and then peering out to observe the enemy, thinking probably that after all our miseries and hardships we might be discovered, retaken, and that, too, so near home. But fortune once more favored us. The cavalcade passed on, within a few steps of us. The lazy pelado remounted and joined his palsanos, and they were soon out of sight, going toward Laredo. Our natural conclusion was that the fellow whom we had hailed near town had hastened into Laredo, told of having seen two Tejanos, and this was the returning company that had been sent to head us off and recapture us.

After a wearisome day's travel, that night we camped at the "Thirty Mile" water hole, and the night following we reached the Nueces without incident, save that during the evening I found a pair of saddle bags which contained a Texas soldier's regulation coat, three shirts, a fine silk handkerchief, some tobacco and a few bars of lead. The coat and shirt came as a godsend. We were needy. On the next day our meat supply failed; deer were plentiful, but we failed to kill any, although the major fired several shots at close range. When we reached the Frio river we found a great many wild turkeys. I wasted three shots trying to kill one without success. Those Mexican muskets were not made for a Texan. The next morn-

ing Major Oldham fired our last round of powder at a deer and brought it down in its tracks. By this time our hunger had become ravenous, and removing the liver, we hastily built a fire and cooked and ate it in short order. The meat we barbecued after carrying it with us until we came to water. Two days later we reached the Medina river, where we passed the night with a hospitable Mexican, from whom we learned of the recapture of our comrades and that every tenth man had been shot. We also learned that it was then the fourth day of April—nearly two months since we made the break at Salado, and yet it seemed an age. The next day we reached San Antonio. Two prouder and yet more ragged, unclean and more forlorn looking men never entered the plaza of that old town. Men, women and children gazed at us with wonder until it became quickly known that we were Mier prisoners who had escaped from Salado, and when this news was carried through the city we became the object of a solicitude and compassion which we felt that we did not altogether merit. In truth the attentions we received were so generous and spontaneous that to an extent they became embarrassing. Homes were thrown open to us, the town was ours, every want was anticipated and supplied, clothing, saddles, bridles, and horses to carry us home. For three days we enjoyed the splendid hospitalities of the great-souled people of San Antonio, and during which time a great many—fathers, mothers, wives and sisters—flocked to us to learn the fate of sons, brothers, husbands or relatives.

From San Antonio we went to our homes in Fayette county, where there was a repetition of the hospitality shown by San Antonio and where we had the same questions propounded and the same answers to render. This closes the account of my capture and escape as a member of the Mier expedition, an account as near correct in its details as I can give from memory, it being written for my children and grand children.

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